

# The Liverpool Classics Graduate Teaching Fellow Partnership: Interim Report<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

As of the end of July 2013, this project, supported financially by *Classics for All*, has been running for five school terms (from January 2012). As reported in full elsewhere (*JCT* 26, 22-24), the project sends graduate students from the University of Liverpool to schools without Classics in Merseyside to teach Latin or Greek on a weekly basis. Schools pay into the scheme for the teaching they receive at an hourly rate, which subsidises salaries for those teaching on the project through adding to the seed-money granted by *Classics for All*: the longevity of the project is therefore reliant on the uptake from schools, since more schools means more subsidy, and thus salaries can continue and the project roll on from year to year.

This short report offers a sketch of what the scheme has achieved in the last eighteen months, and some musings as to what seem to me to be the real obstacles to getting Latin back into schools, based on my experience so far of talking to schools and teachers involved in this project. I hope what follows may be useful to others planning outreach projects, but also food for thought for those involved in more strategic approaches to encouraging Classics in schools.

## **Overview of Developments**

In short, the scheme has been a success. To give some broad figures, since January 2012 just over 250 hours of Latin and Greek have been taught across 9 schools. At its peak (reached in March 2013), the scheme was teaching 7.5 hours per week and was employing three graduate students to meet demand (each on 0.1FTE contracts). The scheme has developed the teaching skills of these three postgraduate students, one of whom is now employed teaching secondary Classics, as well as financially supporting their studies over a long period of time. To date, it has effectively cost its funder just under £7,000,<sup>2</sup> with the rest of the costs covered by schools: this substantial buffer, and the large number of schools signed up to continue from September means it is financially in good health and looks to continue for some time.

Four schools are looking to increase the number of hours of Latin taught from September 2013, and while recruitment of new schools remains a constant challenge (space opens up as some schools can only commit for a short block of lessons, and the scheme is always looking to expand), on average one school per term joins the scheme. Almost all schools in the project already work with the University of Liverpool's Educational Opportunities department, and it has on the whole only been possible to pass on

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<sup>1</sup> Since writing this report, Amy Coker has stepped down as Co-ordinator of the scheme because of a move of institution in September 2013; Jan Haywood, a former tutor on the scheme, has taken over running the project, and can be reached on [Jan.Haywood@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:Jan.Haywood@liverpool.ac.uk).

<sup>2</sup> i.e. the difference between the original grant of £16,4500 and what is currently in reserve in the account.

information to the right person in a school (often the G&T coordinator or an Assistant Head running enrichment activities), and thus recruit them, through these channels: 'cold calling' or emailing schools directly has almost always been fruitless.<sup>3</sup> As an unexpected side-effect of this, almost all schools in the project educate students who come from areas of the city with high levels of deprivation, and traditionally poor educational achievement: nonetheless, these are schools who are working hard to increase the attainment of their pupils at GCSE and beyond, which is why they seek links with Universities and to expose their students to new educational experiences, like learning Latin. 'Improving cultural capital' and 'widening horizons' are phrases which I have heard over and over again when talking to partner schools and pupils, and it is heartening that through offering Latin this scheme represents so much more to these pupils than just a bit of grammar.

### ***Challenges***

This is all very positive. However, all classes still take place outside the formal school day in the enrichment hour slot (3-4pm) or later, and the real challenge is in moving Latin back into the curriculum. From talking to schools who are the greatest supporters of the scheme, it appears there are two main obstacles: timetabling and staffing.

#### *Timetabling*

Pressure on the timetable strikes me as one of the biggest single challenges. Putting Latin into an already full timetable will mean that something will have to be taken out, and the most natural choice for a school will often be one of the modern languages, which are themselves already struggling in many schools: one of my schools has recently dropped German altogether and now only offers French and Spanish, and there are similar stories from elsewhere (with German in particular in trouble in many schools, it seems). This is a wider problem over which Classicists have little control, although it does perhaps suggest that Classics needs to start talking to MFL and find out what measures they are taking collectively: as a larger community, MFL may be a useful ally.

One of my contacts was however more positive: he suggested that all that was needed was a 'leap of faith' on the part of the school, and that if a school really wanted to reintroduce Latin into the school day, this would be possible (he noted that parent response is highly unpredictable and varies wildly between cohorts, so is perhaps not such an important consideration as one might think). I suspect for many schools, keeping Latin after school is the easier option: they can offer it to those pupils who are keen to take it up, and yet not have the hassle of having to change the curriculum, or employ an additional regular member of staff.

What this boils down to is the fact that the decision as to whether to add Latin to a curriculum is fundamentally – I think – down to the choice of a Head or members of Senior Management Teams: I suspect this will always be a matter of personal choice, but some concerted method of lobbying Heads, Assistant Heads or other members of SMTs would surely be useful, possibly riding the recent wave of Ancient world documentaries? Latin will

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<sup>3</sup> Special mention must go to Deonne Hill from Ed Opps, who has been phenomenally supportive throughout this project.

not suddenly reappear overnight in schools, but a top-down approach in concert with the many local programmes and activities working from the bottom-up across the UK may be a welcome boost.

### *Staffing*

It is well-known that there is a shortage of trained Latin teachers and, while not playing down issues over the lack of PGCE places, alternative routes should be considered. Several schools I worked with have members of staff who would be interested in being able to offer Latin alongside their main subject, e.g. English teachers who have some Latin already, or in particular MFL teachers who have the language teaching experience but lack subject-specific knowledge. Re-training teachers who are in post in Classics-less schools is in particular important for the reintroduction of Latin: a school is taking less of a risk if they use a teacher whom they already employ in another capacity to teach Latin than if they were to look for a new teacher of Classics exclusively. I wonder whether it would be useful to offer a short course to such constituencies (as I believe has happened in the past and is being talked about in some circles), marketed through MFL networks, and/or exam boards, perhaps even as part of the JACT Latin Summer School.

### ***Feedback & Conclusions***

In sum, there is a clear desire on the part of many schools to be able to offer Latin to their pupils, but we must continue to encourage them at each stage to take the next step, from no Latin to after-school Latin, to a few hours in the timetable to taking on a teacher themselves. This will be a slow and cumulative process, but there are positive signs of progress nonetheless. Bottom-up projects like this one can only make progress alongside action taken on a more strategic level.

To finish on an uplifting note, I append some feedback from the 11-13 year old pupils (years 7 and 8) who came to an end of year celebration event for those involved in the scheme, held in the University in May 2013. Pupils were asked three questions, and these are some of the answers to questions 2 and 3; some of these pupils themselves are surprisingly savvy when it comes to their education, but all highlight those reasons for which we all know Latin is still a good thing.

#### Q. 2 What do your parents think about you learning Latin?

- 'They think I am extremely privileged. It's an amazing educational opportunity'
- 'They think it's a very good idea for me to do this. They think it is a good opportunity for me that I should grab with both hands'

#### Q. 3 What's the best thing about learning Latin?

- 'It helps me learn about the past and how people lived. It's a completely new learning experience.'

- 'It will help me in the future to get jobs, and it might help me to get to Uni, it will help me with my English'
- 'It gives us an edge. I think that learning Latin is a great skill for the future. I want to work with words in the future and Latin words have relationships with the English language. It's fun to learn about the Roman culture too.'

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